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ABSTRACT

Appropriate teacher education for special education teachers in Sweden must take into account the following concepts: one handicap often causes a second (often social or psychological); education must begin where the child is, focusing on strengths rather than weaknesses; and team units should be used which are comprised of both ordinary and special students and teachers. (PHR)

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TRAINING METHODS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS OF THE FUTURE

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To be handicapped is often to be multihandicapped. We often find that one handicap causes a second handicap. If you live under certain pressing conditions there is a big risk that you get further problems as a consequence of your real, primary handicap and get a second handicap, sometimes more difficult to bear than the original one. Very often this secondary handicap is of social and psychological nature. Because of your handicap you have to live and behave in a special way. This gives you problems in your social life at school, at your place of work and in your leisure time. At school we become more and more aware of these facts and as teachers, I think we have to look at it from a more overall view rather than from a pedagogical view only. With our special classes and special environment, we often give our handicapped boys and girls a better and more motivating pedagogical situation, but is that enough if in this way we also give them a second handicap, a social handicap by taking them out from that society we want them to be integrated into - the basic goal in our job.

I say primary and secondary handicap. Sometimes it is very difficult to say what is primary and what is secondary. Several investigations have showed that we for instance have a significant connection between emotional problems and reading problems, but what is primary? Do reading problems cause emotional difficulties or do emotional problems cause reading difficulties? We don't know. But in the individual case we must try to find it out. Of course it differs from child to child, but the "medicin" will be quite different due to the underlying basic problem.

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In special education I think we too often behave like the drunken man on his way home one dark night. He was crawling under the street lamp looking for his keys, when a friend came along: "Are you sure that you lost them here?" he asked. "No", said the drunken man "it wasn't here, it was in there in the darkness, but it is much easier to look here".

With his background we see that education of handicapped children is a rather complicated thing, which we can't only turn into a matter of pedagogical methods. Many of the problems these children have are of a kind difficult to get rid of by education only, they can't be "educated away". If the School resources can be used for education only then it is not enough to help the handicapped children. If we look at the development of different approaches to help handicapped children, I notice that we in Sweden begin to look at things from upside down.

Before we were almost exclusively interested in finding pedagogical and psychological methods to change the child. There must be something wrong with him. Very seldom we looked at the school itself or the child's family and very little into our way of living, our society.

Today we are more and more open and directed towards the underlying problems in society, family and school itself, manifested in the child's behaviour. Perhaps it is the school and not always the child who are handicapped.

This actualizes the nature and the role of special education. What is special education? We have done it, but what was it? We all know that it is very difficult to answer that question, because it is so complex and because a great part of it is a matter of attitudes, a way of living. But

among other things I nevertheless will say that it contains a specific effort to meet the child's need of total development, where teaching in some traditional school subjects only is a part. We must not forget the school's responsibility also towards the child's social and emotional development. Are we prepared for that in our teacher training? No, not in my country. I think we are still too much concentrated on the technical and methodological matters. I think we teach too much and that we focus too much the child's weaknesses. Isn't it time now to focus more the child's strongest parts? The Swedish school reform in 1962 had the slogan "Pupils first". I think the new slogan will and must be "Pupils as resources". Earlier the pupil was much of an object, now we begin to see him as a subject.

As I see it, the essential thing is that the traditional education in the ordinary class too often starts from above, from the knowledge and expectation of what we ought to know. Special education starts from below, from an analysis of what the child actually can do. A boy couldn't write. He saw and felt that he hadn't any chance to achieve the same results as his classmates, and then he lost his confidence and gave up everything, though he possessed some capacity. This slight capacity is the starting point of special education giving the child a chance to do things he can do and make him feel proud of himself and worthful. Then we can start going further very slowly step by step.

In my country special teacher training is based on prior regular teacher training and after that at least 3 years of education experience. Most students have about 10 years of teacher experience before entering special teacher training at the University department of special education. So they are all well acquainted with the education profession and the different kind of school subjects, so we can use the one year training for other things.

This also convinces me that all being special teachers can have a common training period all together for about one term before specialization, dealing with the general aims of special education, analysis of themselves and their own attitudes towards handicapped persons, to meet and practice with different kinds of handicapped children and not least meet and work together with their parents. In our department we have started to let the students help parents with handicapped children so that the parents now and then can have a chance to be free to visit friends, go to cinemas, go to the theatre and so on. The students two by two take care of the child in its home. The students learn much about handicapped children and they learn much about how it is to be a parent of handicapped children . We think this is a very important knowledge to have when later working in school with these children.

This part of our special teacher training is a good example that education and teacher training must have contact with society and not remain too much inside the University studying about things when reality is just outside, in the surroundings. We must decrease the theory-practice gap which exists today.

We can't see the child as an isolated boy or girl. He is also a member of a family group and other groups and we must be aware of this and cooperate with it. There is a very big risk that we in our very specialized society lose the entirety. We must again state that many problems are impossible to "educate away", to get rid of by education, even with the most brilliant pedagogical methods. Special education is still too often like Columbus' famous voyage - when he set out he didn't know where he was going, when he arrived he didn't know where he was and on his return he didn't know where he'd been.

I think we have to put aside, as soon as possible, one of many people desired hope, how to arrange pastoral care and special education without any effort. We must state that helping children with various forms of difficulties needs personal engagement, patience and very hard work from all of us. Experience shows us that there are very small chances to find a magic formula which makes it possible for a few specialists to do the job, so that most of us can escape from it. To help handicapped children is not one man's job. It must be a teamwork where all of us must be involved. And this must influence the organisation and methods of special teacher training too.

In Sweden the difference between ordinary education and special education begins to be smaller and smaller. Almost all children, even the severely handicapped, are integrated in ordinary schools. You can perhaps say that special education is disappearing but I think it is more true to say that all education today begins to be special education in that sense that the main goals are the same. That means that every teacher also has to be some kind of a special teacher. Special education is not any longer a job only for a specialist to whom I can send over troublesome children. Every three and four classes in comprehensive school form a "working unit" responsible even for the handicapped child. Today it is possible for us in Sweden to have one full time special teacher attached to every working unit helping the children and the fellow teachers with the different kinds of difficulties. This is a far going integrated special education. The working team has the liberty to organize the pupils of each working unit into smaller groups. These groups must be flexible, however. The amount of pupils in the different groups can vary according to the individual pupil's situation. This means that pupils with handicaps or learning disabilities can go to a very

small group with the special teacher as a leader, but the whole team has the responsibility for all children in the unit. Every teacher is involved in helping different kind of handicapped children and should therefore know something about the existence of such difficulties, their background and symptoms. A development in accordance with the principle of integration even in respect of pupils with relatively severe handicaps makes this absolutely necessary. Every teacher must be equipped in the ordinary classroom situation, to meet the special problems involved in the handicap of such a child.

To sum up I think the methods of special teacher training of tomorrow must more than today try to balance the need of specialists to the need of special teacher training for all teachers in the ordinary schools. Today we teach too much, we are too much specialized and we work far too much isolated in special education in my country and we are also far too much focused on what the child can't do instead of what he really can do. He is also far too often an object, but he, his family and environment must be subjects and coworkers jointly responsible for their own future, not an object we as specialists take care of. "If you give a man fish, he can feed himself one day; if you teach him how to fish he can feed himself for the rest of his life".

These things I hope will be focused in special treacher training of the future!